



## Living without a State

*“We are not utopians, and do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses on the part of individual persons, or the need to stop such excesses. In the first place, however, no special machine, no special apparatus of suppression, is needed for this: this will be done by **the armed people themselves**”*

In “[The State and Revolution](#)”, and especially in Chapter 5 of the work (attached, and downloadable via the link below), Lenin treats the question of the demise of the bourgeois state, and of the demise of state in general, as a practical matter of immediate concern. The state is to be replaced by “*the simple organization of the armed people*” and the Russian **Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies** that already existed at the time of his writing the book, just before the October Revolution, were examples of such simple

organisation, wrote Lenin.

This simple kind of organisation is what we in South Africa today would call **organs of people's power**. There is a lot in this chapter that bears upon the question of how to make the revolution permanent, using such principles. The best way to handle it seems to be to quote quite a lot of it, and then to make a few remarks at the end. So here goes (quotations are in italics):

*... in capitalist society we have a democracy that is curtailed, wretched, false, a democracy only for the rich, for the minority. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the period of transition to communism, will for the first time create democracy for the people, for the majority, along with the necessary suppression of the exploiters, of the minority. Communism alone is capable of providing really complete democracy, and the more complete it is, the sooner it will become unnecessary and wither away of its own accord.*

*... under capitalism we have the state in the proper sense of the word, that is, a special machine for the suppression of one class by another, and, what is more, of the majority by the minority. Naturally, to be successful, such an undertaking as the systematic suppression of the exploited majority by the exploiting minority calls for the utmost ferocity and savagery in the matter of suppressing, it calls for seas of blood, through which mankind is actually wading its way in slavery, serfdom and wage labour.*

*[Now we can] fully appreciate the correctness of Engels' remarks mercilessly ridiculing the absurdity of combining the words "freedom" and "state". So long as the state exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no state.*

*What is usually called socialism was termed by Marx the "first", or lower, phase of communist society. Insofar as the means of production becomes common property, the word "communism" is also applicable here, providing we do not forget that this is not complete communism. The great significance of Marx's explanations is that here, too, he consistently applies materialist dialectics, the theory of development, and regards communism as something which develops out of capitalism.*

*Democracy means equality. The great significance of the proletariat's struggle for equality and of equality as a slogan will be clear if we correctly interpret it as meaning the abolition of classes. But democracy means only formal equality. And as soon as equality is achieved for all members of society in relation to ownership of the means of production, that is, equality of labour and wages, humanity will inevitably be confronted with the question of advancing farther, from formal equality to actual equality, i.e., to the operation of the rule "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs".*

*By what stages, by means of what practical measures humanity will proceed to this supreme aim we do not and*

*cannot know. But it is important to realize how infinitely mendacious is the ordinary bourgeois conception of socialism as something lifeless, rigid, fixed once and for all, whereas in reality socialism will only be the beginning of a rapid, genuine, truly mass forward movement, embracing first the majority and then the whole of the population, in all spheres of public and private life.*

***Democracy is of enormous importance to the working class in its struggle against the capitalists for its emancipation. But democracy is by no means a boundary not to be overstepped; it is only one of the stages on the road from feudalism to capitalism, and from capitalism to communism.***

### **The Road to Freedom**

The following statements by Lenin from this chapter spell out the road from capitalism via socialism to communism:

*Democracy is a form of the state, it represents, on the one hand, the organized, systematic use of force against persons; but, on the other hand, it signifies the formal recognition of equality of citizens, the equal right of all to determine the structure of, and to administer, the state. This, in turn, results in the fact that, at a certain stage in the development of democracy, it first welds together the class that wages a revolutionary struggle against capitalism - the proletariat, and enables it to crush, smash to atoms, wipe off the face of the earth the bourgeois, even the republican-bourgeois, state machine, the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy and to*

*substitute for them a more democratic state machine, but a state machine nevertheless, in the shape of armed workers who proceed to form a militia involving the entire population.*

***Accounting and control*** - that is mainly what is needed for the "smooth working", for the proper functioning, of the first phase of communist society. All citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers. All citizens become employees and workers of a single countrywide state "syndicate". All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equal pay; the accounting and control necessary for this have been simplified by capitalism to the utmost and reduced to the extraordinarily simple operations - which any literate person can perform - of supervising and recording, knowledge of the four rules of arithmetic, and issuing appropriate receipts.

*When the majority of the people begin independently and everywhere to keep such accounts and exercise such control over the capitalists (now converted into employees) and over the intellectual gentry who preserve their capitalist habits, this control will really become universal, general, and popular; and there will be no getting away from it, there will be "nowhere to go".*

*The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay.*

## Easier said than done?

Clearly, the kind of stateless self-organisation of the armed people envisaged above by Lenin did not happen in the remaining six years of his lifetime, and still less did it come to pass in the USSR in the years that followed. It is true that the Soviet Union was constantly under attack, but this by itself is not an explanation. If the free organisation of an armed people is a higher form of organisation, then *prima facie* it ought to be the best kind of organisation in wartime, too. The argument that says that there cannot be socialism in one country is a fallacy to this extent, in the absence of further elaboration.

The history of the Soviet Union and of the other socialist countries, including China, Vietnam, DPRK and Cuba today, can never be reduced to a formula. Yet it does seem that more work of the kind that Lenin was doing on his unfinished book, *The State and Revolution*, is needed. Such work could resemble that of our late comrade Ron Press, in his essay “[New Tools for Marxists](#)”, where Ron Press showed how “Chaos Theory” validates and elaborates the theory of a society existing without a State. The image above is one of the diagrams that Ron Press used to illustrate his article. We will return to Ron Press’s article in the last part of this course.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [State and Revolution, Chapter 5, Economic Basis of Withering Away of the State, Lenin](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).